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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KSUM](#) [KPAO](#) [TD](#)

SUBJECT: T&T ENCOURAGED BY WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE

¶1. SUMMARY: Trinidad and Tobago's participant at the July 9 White House Conference on the Americas was enthusiastic about the conference as a morale boost and supported the idea of more regionally-based or subject-specific events in the future. T&T along with other Caribbean countries would benefit from specialized engagement to develop civil society organization capacity and build government recognition and respect for the potential contributions of such organizations. END SUMMARY.

¶2. Post provided funding for Rhonda Maingot, founder of Trinidad's Living Water Community, a Catholic Charismatic Lay Community active in ministering to the poor of Trinidad, to attend the Conference as one of only a handful of Caribbean delegates and the only participant from T&T. Maingot felt this conference was very encouraging for NGOs and faith-based organizations in the hemisphere, as it demonstrated the United States' interest in "helping NGOs alleviate the plight of the poor." She especially appreciated the USG's "vision" that includes a significant role for NGOs, especially when contrasted with what she described as GOTT ministries' dismissive attitude towards NGOs.

¶3. Maingot's sole criticism of the conference was that interaction between participants was difficult in the context of a single-day event. She was thus enthusiastic about the possibility of future conferences or events with a subject matter or Caribbean focus. She noted that she had shared her experiences from the conference with members of her organization but not with local media or other Trinbagonians.

¶4. COMMENT: Maingot's observation about the T&T government's disregard for NGOs is not unique. Academic, business and international organization contacts have also commented on the lack of government recognition for NGOs and the limited development of civil society organizations, both in T&T and throughout the Caribbean. Some comment that T&T has functional democratic institutions and therefore the need to develop civil society is less urgent than in many Latin American countries. Others point to ruling party resentment of NGO activities that provide grist for the political opposition.

¶5. COMMENT CONTINUED: While T&T NGOs clearly would benefit from further hemisphere-wide events, post believes NGOs in the English-speaking Caribbean would gain more from smaller, more focused events that take into account the circumstances of this region in order to build local NGO capacity both to meet their programmatic goals and simultaneously to develop more mature, constructive relationships with governments. END COMMENT.

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